

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

APR 22 2009

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name Parachute Building  
Other name/site number 151-70

### 2. Location

Street & number 40131 Barker Avenue ☐ not for publication  
City or town Pratt ☐ vicinity  
State Kansas Code KS County Pratt Code 151 Zip code 67124

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patrick Zollner

2-27-09

Patrick Zollner, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
Kansas State Historical Society

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- ☐ entered in the National Register. ☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register ☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other, (explain:)

Parachute Building  
Name of Property

Pratt County, Kansas  
County and State

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private  
☒ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	
	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register**

0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter Categories from instructions)

DEFENSE: AIR FACILITY

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Mid-20<sup>th</sup> c. military construction practices

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Concrete  
Walls: Wood

Roof: Asphalt shingle

Other:

## Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Parachute Building

Name of Property

Pratt County, Kansas

County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Military

### Period of Significance

1942 - 1945

### Significant Dates

1942 - 1945

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

U. S. Army Corps of Engineers

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
- Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Parachute Building

Name of Property

Pratt County, Kansas

County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property One acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	4	5	2	2	7	9	0	4	1	7	2	3	2	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

3														
Zone	Easting						Northing							

☐ See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/title Phillip T. Schulz

Organization

Date 08-13-08

Street &amp; number 205 S Keystone St P.O. Box 11

Telephone 620-282-1123

City or town Stafford

State KS

Zip code 67578

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

Name Pratt Airport Authority; Daniel Gamblin, Chairman

Street &amp; number 40131 Barker Ave

Telephone 620-672-7571

City or town Pratt

State KS

Zip code 67124

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 1

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

---

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

The Parachute Building (1942-1943) is typical of mid-20th century military construction. Not only is it simple in design with little ornamentation, but also its form and appearance reflect its intended use. Its lack of ornamentation and eaves coupled with the use of many windows saved on scarce construction materials. The building includes two principal masses – a tall, flat-roofed, 40-foot-high rectangular parachute loft and a long, gabled, one-story packing area. The building rests on a concrete foundation, is clad with wood flush-joint siding, and includes several windows for good ventilation.

**Exterior**

The parachute loft is one bay deep and forty feet tall. This vertical section includes a garage door bay on the south elevation that measures 12'4" wide and 12' high. The vertical sliding door is non-historic. This loft section has eight rectangular openings located just beneath the roofline – two on each elevation. Seven openings feature louvers for ventilation, and one on the south elevation is covered. There is another single louvered opening lower on the east elevation just above the gabled section.

The gabled, one-story, horizontal section intersects with the loft's east elevation. It extends sixty feet eastward and is thirty-four feet wide. The exterior elevations are clad with tongue-and-groove flush joint wood siding over diagonal sheathing boards. The roof is covered with asphalt composition shingles. The south elevation features a single-door pedestrian entrance at the west end and six equally spaced one-over-one, double-hung, modern replacement windows. The easternmost window is covered. The east elevation includes a garage door bay that measures 14'4" wide and 9' high. The vertical sliding door is non-historic. Centered within the peak of the gable is a rectangular louvered opening. The north elevation includes six one-over-one, double-hung, modern replacement windows. The westernmost window is covered.

A one-story intersecting gabled bay extends north from the middle of the north elevation. This rectangular bay extension measures twelve feet by fifteen feet and includes four covered openings on the north elevation. A fifteen by fifteen feet concrete pad with short retaining walls is situated north of this intersecting bay. This area was used to store coal, which was used to heat the structure. The boiler was located within the extension with a chimney placed upon a four by four feet concrete pad south of the exterior wall. This pad is extant but the chimney is not. Coal was used to heat the buildings on the air base until the mid years of World War II when natural gas was piped in to supply fuel for heat. A historic base map of 1943 shows the routing of these underground pipes. Still extant in the building are circular metal brackets attached to the ceiling joists overhead to secure the steam pipes.

**Interior**

The interior of the Parachute Building consists of two large rooms, a restroom, a storage room, and a furnace room. The gabled, one-story, horizontal section is a large, open room resembling a typical garage interior. It includes a concrete floor and simple finishes. The bottom one-third of the walls are clad with

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 2

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

wood, flush-joint siding much like the building's exterior. It is painted white. The top two-thirds of the walls and ceiling are clad with square, unadorned fiber panels. Pairs of roof rafters pierce the ceiling and

connect to the walls between the windows. Although plenty of natural light streams through the windows, there are modern fluorescent lights interspersed among three 1940s-era industrial light fixtures located at the east end of the horizontal section. These lights have glass globes with large metal hoods to hold the light sockets. There are also two similar lights remaining in the upper portion of the loft. Wooden four-pane double doors separate the loft area from the rest of the interior. Wooden louvers for ventilation are in the lower third of the doors.

The bathroom is located in the northeast end of the one-story bay with the storage room just adjacent, south of that. The fixtures in the bathroom are simple and unadorned. There are wood framed shelves attached to the walls of the storage room.

The interior of the loft section is finished much like that of the one-story gabled section. The bottom one-third of the walls are clad with wood, flush joint siding that is unpainted. The loft's dimensions are thirty-four feet deep by eighteen feet wide. The top two-thirds of the walls and ceiling are clad with square, unadorned fiber panels. There is a wood ladder in the northeast corner that extends through the dropped ceiling into the loft. The dropped ceiling is positioned fourteen feet off the concrete floor. A second ceiling is located just below the roof in the loft with an additional opening to allow access for storage.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 3

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

---

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Pratt Army Airfield Parachute Building (1942-1943) is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with mid-20<sup>th</sup> century military practices and under Criterion C for its architectural significance as a representative example of World War II-era military construction. The historic integrity of the entire air field property has been diminished with the development of modern warehouses and aviation-related structures. Therefore, this nomination only includes the Parachute Building and its immediate surroundings.

A recent survey of 170 historic resources on World War II-era airbases in Kansas revealed only one other extant parachute building located at the Coffeyville Army Air Field.<sup>1</sup>

WW II Airbases and B29s

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt presented his plan to the nation and the world for protecting those affected by the Japanese imperialist government and its military. In a radio address, he shared his concerns and foretold the need of an increase in spending for aggressive wartime production goals.

...This war is a new kind of war. It is different from all other wars of the past, not only in its methods and weapons but also in its geography. It is warfare in terms of every continent, every island, every sea, every air-lane in the world...we must all understand and face the hard fact that our job now is to fight at distances which extend all the way around the globe...<sup>2</sup>

His proposal called for the production of 60,000 planes, 45,000 tanks, 20,000 antiaircraft guns, and 6 million deadweight tons of merchant shipping. Of the \$59 billion budget submitted January 7, he asked to have more than \$52 billion earmarked for the war effort.

President Roosevelt realized that the world could not be protected from Japan's aggression without a substantial advantage in the strength of equipment and airplanes. In a promise made to China's Nationalist Party leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kia-shek, Roosevelt planned to have B-29 bombers stationed in India and China by January 1944 for Operation Matterhorn that would be implemented as an air war against Japan. Those countries would provide space for B-29 air bases.

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan Jezak Ford, "Survey Report of World War II Air Bases in Kansas" (Topeka: Kansas Department of Transportation, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Roosevelt, Franklin. President of the United States. *Conduct of the War Address*  
Broadcast nationwide and worldwide via radio February 23, 1942 at 10:00 pm EST on the occasion of the 210<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Washington's birthday. Accessed at: <http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/20th/fc/20.html>

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 4

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

In July 1943 the first bomber wing, the 58<sup>th</sup>, began training at the four Kansas Army Air Fields located at Smoky Hill (Headquarters), Pratt, Great Bend and Walker. The first B-29s were produced at the Boeing Aircraft Facility in Wichita but they were inadequate for combat. When put to the test, many problems were discovered with the engines overheating, radar equipment, bad tires, faulty props and guns.<sup>3</sup>

On March 9, 1944, General of the Army, H. H. Arnold, arrived at the Smoky Hill Army Air Field near Salina to check on the combat readiness status of the B-29s. Dissatisfied with the answer given him of none, he launched a barrage of new orders to make the planes ready for long distance warfare. The early B-29s (YB-29s) were intended to serve only as trainers. Modifications had to be made and in a hurry to satisfy Arnold's new plan. Kansas became the site of rapid development in air power. The efforts of those four Kansas Army Air Fields became known as the Battle of Kansas. All the B-29s used in the first raid on Japan on the steel center at Yawata, June 15, 1944, were built at Wichita and were processed from these air fields.

General of the Army H. H. Arnold, chief of the air force, had already worked out a schedule for the bombing of Japan. According to the *Post* (*Saturday Evening Post*, August 25, 1945) Arnold thereupon "exploded a string of 'impossible' orders that set phones jangling all over the country," and "so began an uproar famed as the Salina Blitz, or The Battle of Kansas. Overnight, Kansas swarmed with tough colonels. G. I. mechanics flew in from a dozen states, and Boeing sent 600 civilian experts from the Wichita plant. Maj. Gen. Bennett E. Meyers gave them the pitch: No paperwork except simple notes of work done; hours would be as long as a man could stand on his feet; the last plane must fly away April fifteenth.

They worked outdoors in a wintry gale; hangars were scarce. The wind hissed with sleet. Loose cowlings flapped and clattered and sailed away. Gasoline heaters were flown in; and every shivering man was issued a high-altitude flying suit... Training engines were yanked. War engines were installed, the latest model of delicate fire-control mechanisms were delivered to waiting B-29's in soft-sprung ambulances. Spare engines were hoisted into bomb bays, and one B-29 was ready, and then another. . . . The last B-29 left Kansas April fifteenth, right on the blitz deadline.' Two months later they bombed the Japanese homeland...<sup>4</sup>

### History of the Pratt Army Air Field:

The creation of air bases and military forts impact the surrounding communities in many ways. Pratt was no exception. As the population increased rapidly, civilian housing and medical facilities had to serve the soldiers until the completion of a base.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothea Giannangelo *Pratt Army Air Field World War II 1943 - 1945* (Publisher unknown, 2002, pp. 28-29.)

<sup>4</sup> Linda McCaffery, *The History of the B-29 Superfortress* (Pratt, KS: Pratt County Historical Museum, 2008).



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

Section Number 8 Page 5

The impact on communities with air fields was similar to those with war industries. The population increased rapidly, stretching housing, medical, and educational facilities to the limit. In August 1944, for example, Walker Army Air Field had 5,936 military and 659 civilian personnel. The population of nearby Hays was 6,385. In Great Bend, two young couples shared a converted chicken house, while four other couples lived in a basement and shared one bathroom. All of the couples were just glad to have found a place to live. In spite of the strain, the communities tried to make the men and women feel welcome, for they also had family members far from home.”<sup>5</sup>

On August 22, 1942 the War Department authorized an army air installation at Pratt. Some 1,440 acres north of Pratt was acquired for the construction of the Pratt Army Air Field. Construction began during the first week of October 1942. On October 1, eleven Rock Island Railroad cars unloaded the heavy equipment to be used by the base engineers. Construction continued through the winter. More construction of barracks and additional support structures were completed in 1943.

On February 1, 1943, the first detachment of twelve men arrived. Two weeks later on February 16th, the first planes arrived. These aircraft were only trainers from the Pratt Airport flight school across town. At this time, the mission of PAAF changed from an auxiliary field status to a full time air base. On May 2, 1943, an open house was held for the public at the Pratt Army Air Field. 13,146 people entered to view only the unclassified areas of the new base.

Originally, P.A.A.F. was designed to function as one of several bases under the control of the 21<sup>st</sup> Bombardment Wing. This organization's task was to process for overseas duty the bombardment wings formed and trained under the Second Air Force. However, the enormous effort necessary to form and train the B-29 Groups diverted Pratt from this original mission to becoming one of several fields dedicated to the special B-29 combat training program. During 1943 and 1944 newly-formed B-29 bombardment Groups, specifically the 40<sup>th</sup>, 497<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 346<sup>th</sup>, and 93<sup>rd</sup>, conducted their own training at Pratt...<sup>6</sup>

Even though the B-29s had started arriving by late 1943 and early 1944, problems kept the airplanes from being ready for bombing missions. The demand for new planes necessitated the need of air fields such as P.A.A.F. to become one of the four maintenance modification centers in Kansas. It was far more efficient to keep producing the planes, not shut down the production, and send them to the air fields to be finished.

Commitments had been made, however, to get some B-29s into combat by June, and time was running out. So the decision was made to focus resources of men and material at the four Kansas bases, Smoky Hill, Pratt, Great Bend and Walker, to prepare enough B-29s for combat in the

<sup>5</sup> Dorothea Giannangelo, *Pratt Army Air Field: World War II 1943-1945* (Publisher Unknown, 2005), 5. Copy on file at Cultural Resources Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 25.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 6

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

China-Burma and India theater (sic.). This was the start of the "Battle of Kansas." From all over the country, by train and plane, the necessary men and material were rushed to the four airbases to make the many needed changes...All of this had to be done in the middle of the flat Kansas prairie

near the end of a brutal Kansas winter. Snow was everywhere...the bases did not have sufficient hangar space, so considerable work was done outside, night and day, on a twenty-four basis.<sup>7</sup>

A brief summary of those seven modifications by the 40<sup>th</sup> at PAAF are such that:

- Change all engines that were not classed as 'War' engines. From February 7 to March 11th, 116 engines and 24 turbo-superchargers were replaced.
- Any rudder not new and of strengthened design (total of 22) was replaced.
- All main landing gear tires (144 in total) were replaced.
- Engine vibration was cracking the engine mounts and furthermore created faulty, leaking exhaust collector rings. One hundred sets of rings were replaced.

The allowable engine cylinder head temperature was 265 degrees. I never saw a temperature on the early B-29s that was under 300 degrees on takeoff. As a result, we were losing engines and aircraft even before they left the runway. It wasn't uncommon to replace all top cylinders four or five times to try to reach the 400-hour overhaul limit on the engines. We also had a tremendous problem with exhaust stacks and exhaust collector rings. These would blow out, and you either feathered the engine or risked the danger of a fire in the engine or nacelle.<sup>8</sup>

- The B-29 engine had been experiencing an overheating concern causing the engine to lose cylinders for losses of horsepower, equipment and lives. Cowl flaps above the exhaust manifolds were raised two-inches to allow for better airflow around the cylinders. The engines relied on unobstructed airflow for cooling.
- The radar section installed and tested the 36 new APQ-13 radar sets.
- All propeller pistons and governors had to be modified for a more certain "feathering" at high altitudes that would allow the engines to somewhat relax during cruise and reduce fuel consumption. A total of 100 propellers and governors were replaced.

<sup>7</sup> Lou Thole, *Forgotten Fields of America: World War II Bases and Training Then and Now Volume II* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., 1996), 122-123.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Wyatt, *World War II: 40th Bomb Group Aviation History* (Holmes, PA: Weider History Group, Sept. 1994).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 7

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

Each B-29 was to be flown for a period of not less than two hours to break-in the new engines and verify all work was completed correctly. All of these seven modifications were done in a period of five weeks. Six hundred factory mechanics from the Wichita Boeing plant were called on to assist in the four Kansas army air fields. Many of the Boeing mechanics were approached at home, off-shift while others were contacted and hired on the jobsite.

In preparation for war, the Pratt Army Air Field was a working entity whereas each group of the wartime mission supported and relied upon the other. The duties performed in the Parachute Building by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Echelon's Parachute Rigging department under direction of Lt. Joseph Fawell were as equally important as any others on the base. The unique, long and tall parachute building served as a facility for the drying, inspections, cleaning and reassembling of parachutes.

### Parachute Building History

The Parachute Building played a vital role in the efforts to train and equip the aircrews for their mission to China, later Saipan and Tinian Islands, for the campaign against Japan by the 21<sup>st</sup> Bomber Command.

Reporting to duty in the Parachute Building, Lt. Joseph Fawell's platoon consisted of seven women and one man. Of the seven women, Pfc. Fernande Quick and Pvt. Virginia McCoy were members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC). The lone GI male was Sgt. Harold Southard. The WAC soldiers arrived at PAAF in May of 1944.

...in December 1941, the Army Air Forces began to exhibit considerable interest in creating an Air Force Section within the proposed Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC)...Congress finally passed the Rogers Bill 15 May 1942, and the next day Oveta Culb Hobby was sworn in as director of the new organization. From the time of the AAF Headquarters' letter of December 1941 until the actual arrival of the first WAAC members on 20 September 1942, the Army Air Forces assumed the lead in developing plans for the use of female troops. The AAF leadership had a much broader view of employing women than restricting them to the roles of typists or telephone operators.<sup>9</sup>

...The AAF (Army Air Field) was especially anxious to obtain WAACs, and each unit was eagerly anticipated and very well treated. Eventually the Air forces obtained forty-percent of all WAACS in the Army. Women were assigned as weather observers and forecasters, cryptographers, radio operators and repairmen, sheet metal workers, parachute riggers, link trainer

<sup>9</sup> Deborah G. Douglas and Amy E. Foster, *American Women and Flight Since 1940* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 66-67.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 8

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

instructors, bombsight maintenance specialists, aerial photograph analysts, and control tower operators...<sup>10</sup>

Civilian workers were equally as important in the jobs of the parachute riggers. Three women of PAAFs 3<sup>rd</sup> Echelon had called Pratt home.

The foreman of the civilian workers is Gladys Trekell who holds a CAA riggers license and has spent several years as an instructor at the Tyler Parachute School. Her home is in Okla. but three of her co-workers are natives of Pratt, Hattie (Billie) Willis, Lavona (Babe) Wymer and Edith Eichenour. The fourth, Lucy Tincher, hails from Trousdale, Kas.<sup>11</sup>

The Parachute Building's design allowed the parachute riggers to inspect the squadron's parachutes and rigging every 60 days for a complete inspection out of the inclement weather and wind. They checked each chute for stains from gas, oil or grease and holes or tears. Any hole or tear that was less than twelve inches in length would be repaired. Anything larger, the parachute would have to be exchanged for a replacement. The monetary value of each chute during early World War II was \$163. The materials for which each one was made consisted of 65 yards of nylon and silk, leather straps and rings bound by hundreds of feet nylon suspension lines. Therefore, the design of the Parachute Building was critical for flawless safety inspections.

Each chute is composed of four parts: canopy, the silk balloon; pack, shrouds, retainer loops and container; harness, which straps onto the most important part—the guy whose life may depend on the successful operation of the chute. ...Parachutes are one thing which are seldom returned for refund because of unsatisfactory performance. The HAVE to be right the first time.

There are all kinds of riggers in all types of employment, ship riggers, clothes riggers and parachute riggers, but the only ones who can fold 65 yards of silk and hundreds of feet of nylon suspension lines into a little pack which will fit in a good sized hip pocket are parachute riggers. And that is what they are doing the the (sic.) biggest part of the time. If they aren't busy folding them, they are inspecting or repairing chute.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Judith A. Bellafaire, *The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service* (Washington, DC: Army Center of Military History, US Government Printing Office: 1993), 11. Note: By an amendment, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) became the Women's Army Corps (WAC) on Jul. 3, 1943 by making them a branch of the Army. Until 1943, WAAC had not been an actual part of the Army.

<sup>11</sup> *Pratt Tailwind* (P.A.A.F. Base Newspaper), "Parachute Building: One Place There is Plenty of Silk and Nylon." Vol. II, No. 36 (Oct. 21, 1944), 7. Accessed online on January 23, 2009 at: <http://paaf.indexks.com/eng/Our-Collections/Documents/Pratt-Tailwind/Parachute-Building-Vol.-II-No.-36-21-Oct.-1944>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 9

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

---

**Architecture**

The World War II-era Parachute Building (1943) is one of the few remaining structures of its type in Kansas. The only other extant parachute building on a World War II-era airbase is located at Coffeyville. Both buildings feature similar characteristics and reflect their use as a parachute rigging and cleaning facility. With its simple, functional design and lack of ornamentation, the building is typical of mid-20th century military construction. According to Susan Ford's "Survey Report of World War II Air Bases in Kansas"

Army buildings were ultimately utilitarian and quickly assembled. Most base buildings, not meant for long-term use, were constructed of temporary or semi-permanent materials. Although some hangars had steel frames and the occasional brick or tile brick building could be seen, most support buildings sat on concrete foundations but were of frame construction clad in little more than plywood and tarpaper. The buildings at Kansas Army [air] bases were usually consistent in design...Support buildings also resembled each other from base to base. Most can be described [stylistically] as Minimal Traditional, devoid of any decoration and focusing on economy of materials. The purpose of each support building is usually not recognizable from its appearance, with the exception of the parachute buildings.<sup>13</sup>

**Summary**

The Parachute Building is quite distinctive and retains a high degree of architectural integrity. As its form suggests, it was designed and used during World War II for the sole purpose of maintaining and preparing parachutes for those soldiers in the bombing missions.

The Pratt Army Air Field Historical Group intends to restore this building and to display their Pratt Army Air Field History Collection there. The plans are to tell the history and activities that were part of the Pratt area during the war while the air field was active.

---

<sup>13</sup> Susan Jezak Ford, "Survey Report of World War II Air Bases in Kansas" (Topeka: Kansas Department of Transportation, 2008).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9 Page 10

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

---

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bellafaire, Judith A. *The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service*  
Army Center of Military History. US Government Printing Office. Washington, D.C.  
January 1993. p. 11. ISBN: 0-16-038207-6  
KSHS Library: 355 Pam. v.2 no.4

Douglas, Deborah G. and Amy E. Foster *American Women and Flight Since 1940*  
University Press of Kentucky, Lexington, KY. 2004  
KSHS Library: 629.13 D745

Ford, Susan Jezak. "Survey Report of World War II Air Bases in Kansas"  
Kansas Department of Transportation, Topeka, KS. 2008.  
Filed at the Kansas Historical Society, Cultural Resources Division, Topeka, KS.

Giannangelo, Dortha. *Pratt Army Air Field: World War II 1943-1945*  
Publisher Unknown. 2002  
Copy is on file at KSHS Cultural Resources Division

Kansas State Historical Society. *The Battle of Kansas*  
Kansas Historical Quarterly. November 1945 (Vol. 13 No. 8). pp. 481-485.  
Also accessed at: [http://www.kshs.org/publicat/khq/1945/45\\_8\\_battle.htm](http://www.kshs.org/publicat/khq/1945/45_8_battle.htm)

McCaffery, Linda. *The History of the B-29 Superfortress*  
Pratt County Historical Museum. 2008  
Also accessed at: <http://paaf.indexks.com/eng/Our-Collections/Documents/The-History-of-the-B-29-Superfortress>

*Pratt Tailwind*. "Parachute Building: One Place There is Plenty of Silk and Nylon"  
P.A.A.F. Base Newspaper. (Vol. II, No. 36.) October 21, 1944. p. 7.  
Also accessed at: <http://paaf.indexks.com/eng/Our-Collections/Documents/Pratt-Tailwind/Parachute-Building-Vol.-II-No.-36-21-Oct.-1944>

Roosevelt, Franklin. President of the United States. *Conduct of the War Address*  
Broadcast nationwide and worldwide via radio February 23, 1942 at 10:00 pm EST on the occasion of the 210<sup>th</sup> anniversary of George Washington's birthday. Accessed at:  
<http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/20th/fc/20.html>

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9 Page 11

Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

---

Schumann, Richard E. *Compensation from World War II through the Great Society. (Report on the American Workforce)*

Compensation & Working Conditions. (Vol. 6 No. 3.) Fall 2001

Also accessed at: <http://www.bls.gov/opub/cwc/cm20030124ar04p1.htm>

(Originally posted 01.30.03)

Thole, Lou. *Forgotten Fields of America: World War II Bases and Training Then and Now. Volume II*

Pictorial Histories Publishing Co. Missoula, MT. 1996

ISBN-13: 9781575100104

Wyatt, Daniel. *World War II: 40th Bomb Group*

Aviation History. Weider History Group. Holmes, Pa. September 1994.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number Add'l Documentation Page 12 Parachute Building  
Pratt, Pratt County, KS

---

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The tract is the South 230' by 175' of Lot Twenty-four (24) of the Pratt Airport Industrial Park, City of Pratt, State of Kansas, .92 acres.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The nominated property includes the land historically associated with Pratt Army Air Field Parachute Building.

**PHOTOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Property Name: Parachute Building  
Location: Pratt Air Field, Pratt Co. Kansas  
Photographer: Sarah Martin  
Date: December 2, 2008

- Photo 1: Exterior south and east elevation.
- Photo 2: Exterior west and north elevation including coal bin and furnace room.
- Photo 3: Exterior west and north elevation close up of loft vents.
- Photo 4: Exterior east and north elevation including coal bin and furnace room.
- Photo 5: Exterior north elevation, west wall of furnace room and concrete chimney pad.
- Photo 6: Interior of one-story gabled section, west to east view
- Photo 7: Interior of one-story gabled section, east to west view showing entrances to the loft, bathroom and furnace room.
- Photo 8: One of three extant 1940s-era industrial light fixtures in one-story gabled section.
- Photo 9: Interior entrance into loft, east to west view.
- Photo 10: Interior of loft, south to north view showing ladder for access to upper level in the NE corner.
- Photo 11: Interior entrance to bathroom, east to west view.
- Photo 12: Interior of storage room, south to north view.



Reconnaissance

Prairie Co, KS

14: 522790

4172 340

4230'

6259 III NE  
(COATS-NE)

